



**U.S. Department of Justice**

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**SENTENCES IMPOSED IN SHRIMPER'S "DEATH" HOAX MATTER**

Lisa Godbey Wood, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced that **Kevin Klarell Washington**, age 32, and his wife, **Lavonnica Denise Washington**, age 29, of **Savannah, Georgia**, were sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Savannah, Georgia.

Appearing before Judge B. Avant Edenfield, Kevin Klarell Washington was sentenced to serve 188 months in federal prison on his convictions for knowingly and intentionally distributing "crack" cocaine on November 3, 2004 in Savannah and for making a false distress call to the United States Coast Guard on September 13, 2005. His wife was sentenced to 24 months in federal prison on her conviction for testifying falsely before the federal grand jury. Wood pointed out that there is no parole in the federal system.

Kevin Washington was reported missing on September 13, 2005 after reportedly falling off the shrimp boat *God's Mercy* in Ossabaw Sound. The United States Coast Guard engaged in intensive search and rescue operations in Ossabaw Sound after Washington's crewmate made an emergency 911 call from a cellular telephone aboard the boat. During her appearance before the grand jury on June 8, 2006, Lavonnica Denise Washington testified under oath that Kevin Klarell Washington had fallen overboard from the fishing vessel "God's Mercy" and drowned. This testimony of Lavonnica Washington was false in that she knew that her husband was alive at the time

of her appearance before the grand jury. Kevin Washington was arrested in Orlando, Florida on June 20, 2006 following reports indicating that he was still alive.

Kevin Washington was also ordered to make restitution to the Coast Guard in the amount of \$314,019.25, the cost of the search and rescue operation. Pursuant to plea agreements, both he and Lavonna Washington were ordered to forfeit their interest in the shrimp boat *God's Mercy* and a 1998 Lexus used during the commission of the drug offense.

In a related case, **Vernon Lavar Campbell** of **Tybee Island** was sentenced to serve 6 months in federal prison for his conviction of misprision of felony. During the early morning hours of September 13, 2005, Campbell used another boat to rendezvous with the *God's Mercy* and take Kevin Washington back to shore. After hearing reports a few hours later that Washington had fallen overboard from the shrimp boat, Campbell failed to report the hoax to authorities. Instead, he delivered a eulogy of Washington at a memorial service staged on October 1, 2005. Campbell was also held responsible for making restitution to the Coast Guard.

Wood praised the investigative efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Coast Guard Investigative Service which led to the indictment and successful prosecution. The United States was represented by Assistant United States Attorney Karl Knoche.

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